

# Research Paper: Intergenerational Study of Commitment in Married Couples Living in Tehran City, Iran



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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Attitudes toward commitment and standards of an intimate relationship can change from one generation to another. In the present study, we aimed to investigate intergenerational differences in commitment between two generations of Iranian married couples.

**Methods:** This study is descriptive cross-sectional research. A total of 240 individuals were recruited out of married men and women and their parents using a convenience sampling method in Tehran City, Iran, in 2015. To collect the study data, we employed the marital commitment questionnaire and the pros and cons of commitment measures to estimate the commitment types and emotions, respectively. Multivariate analysis of variance was used to investigate the differences in commitment types and emotions of commitment between the two generations.

**Results:** The results show that the younger generation had higher scores in positive emotions of commitment, but no difference was observed in negative and constraining emotions. Furthermore, the younger generation had higher scores in personal commitment than the older generation, but not in the moral and structural commitment.

**Conclusion:** This study reveals intergenerational differences in commitment types and emotions in Iranian couples. Further studies should use longitudinal designs in the intergenerational studies of commitment in Iranian couples. Using an indicator of marital satisfaction in future research is recommended.

## Introduction

Psychological research studies always pay lots of attention to marital commitment as the cornerstone of marriage. Commitment to a close relationship has been defined in various ways, such as willingness to con-

tinue a relationship [1], conceptions of partners for the future of their relationship, attachment to a relationship, intention to maintain it [2], partner's judgments regarding the likely relationship permanence [3], personal dedication to the relationship, constraints against leaving it [4], and partners' beliefs over the possible continuation of their relationship over a long period [5].

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Johnson provided one of the widely-accepted definitions of commitment to a close relationship [1]. He defines commitment as the decision to continue a relationship and categorizes three types of marital commitment: personal, moral, and structural. Personal and moral commitments are value-normative aspects of commitment, while structural commitment refers to the barriers that prevent leaving the relationship.

Marital commitment has both negative and positive aspects [6]. On the one hand, individuals need commitment in an intimate relationship as a prominent source of pleasure and satisfaction in life, and on the other hand, committed relationship can be a potential source of conflict and hopelessness and accordingly a threat to individuals' well-being and health [7]. By increasing the strength of commitment, people invest more in their relationship, and if they do not receive a proper response or lose the relationship, they may experience a trauma [8]. American married couples experienced commitment with distinct features of promise (or pledge), dedication (devotion), and attachment or bond [9].

Attitudes toward commitment and standards of an intimate relationship can vary across generations [10]. One study showed an intergenerational difference regarding attitudes toward commitment in romantic relationships [11]. Another research found an intergenerational difference regarding relational standards across three generations of Iranian's married couples [12]. Previous studies have also reported gender differences in commitment construct [6, 11, 13], and some reported gender differences in emotional experiences of commitment [6]. They found that women experience more positive emotions, and men experience more constraining emotions in a relationship.

Another study reported that traditional women tend to be committed morally to their marriage, but it is not the case for the women who believe in gender equality [11]. Moreover, the finding of other research studies showed that men, more than women, tend to overcome negative and constraining emotions of commitment [13].

To our knowledge, no study has investigated intergenerational differences in commitment among Iranian married couples. In the present paper, we aimed to inspect intergenerational differences of types and emotions of commitment in Iranian married couples. Accordingly, this research tries to answer the following questions: Are there any intergenerational differences in types and emotions of commitment among two generations of Iranian married couples? Are there any gender differences

in types and emotions of commitment among Iranian married couples?

## Methods

The present study is a descriptive and cross-sectional study. The statistical population of the study comprised two generations of married men and women aged 20 to 35 years and their parents living in Tehran City, Iran, in 2015. A total of 240 individuals were recruited using a convenience sampling method. Each generation consisted of 60 men and 60 women. The younger generation comprised married men and women aged 20 to 35 years, which at least six months passed from their marriage. The participants voluntarily participated in the research, and their information has kept confidential. They also signed an informed consent form before the study. Firstly, the younger generation that met the inclusion criteria entered the research, and afterwards they were asked to fill the questionnaire and give another questionnaire to their parents with the same sex. Men gave the questionnaires to their fathers and women to their mothers. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the participant.

A marital commitment questionnaire was used to inspect types of commitment. Adams and Jones (1999) designed this questionnaire that assesses three types of marital commitment [14]: Personal commitment, which shows that spouses are committed to each other because the other spouse is attractive; moral commitment, which shows that spouses are morally committed to each other; and structural commitment, which shows that spouses have to be committed to each other because of barriers of breaking a relationship. The questionnaire comprised 44 questions, and the respondent answered each question on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Respondents received a score between 1 and 172, in which greater scores show higher degrees of relationship commitment. To assess personal commitment, moral commitment, and structural commitment, 19, 13, and 12 items were used, respectively. Items 1, 4, 8, 10, 14, 16, 18, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 31, 32, 35, 36, 38, and 44 assess personal commitment. Items 3, 6, 9, 13, 20, 22, 23, 26, 29, 30, 34, 37, 41 assess moral commitment. Items 2, 5, 7, 12, 15, 17, 19, 33, 39, 40, 42, and 43 assess structural commitment. We applied the Farsi version of this questionnaire which its psychometric characteristics have been proved in previous studies [15]. The Cronbach alpha for the present study is 0.95 for the whole scale and 0.89, 0.82, 0.83 for personal, moral, and structural commitment components, respectively.

The pros and cons of commitment measures were used to assess feelings and emotions of commitment. This measure has been designed by Weige and Davis [7] and measures three aspects of the commitment of positive emotions (such as pleasure or kindness), negative emotions (such as anxiety or disappointment), and constraining emotions (such as pressure or dependency). Respondents answer to each question on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The questionnaire has 45 items: 15 items for positive emotions, 15 items for negative emotions, and 15 items for constraining emotions. The total score of the scale ranges from 45 to 315. The psychometric properties of this measure have approved for the original version. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.94 for the whole scale and 0.91, 0.94, 0.93 for positive, negative, and constraining aspects of marital commitment, respectively.

Correlation analysis has applied to inspect the relationship between emotions of commitment and types of commitments. MANOVA was used to investigate

the differences in commitment types and emotions of commitment between the two generations. Similarly, MANOVA was used to examine gender differences in commitment types and emotions of commitment. SPSS V. 22 was used for data analysis.

## Results

Table 2 presents the mean scores of the marital commitment questionnaire and the pros and cons of commitment measure. Table 3 presents the results of the correlation between emotions of commitment and commitment types for both generations.

MANOVA was used to inspect the differences in commitment types and emotions of commitment between men and women. Firstly, we investigated the assumptions of using MANOVA. No univariate and multivariate outliers were detected. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test proved the normality of distribution in all variables ( $P < 0.05$ ). Box's M test was not statistically

**Table 1.** Demographic of the participants (N=240)

Variable	No. (%)			
	Younger Generation		Older Generation	
	Men (n=60)	Women (n=60)	Men (n=60)	Women (n=60)
Age (y)	32.75 (6.38)	29.66 (6.43)	58.54 (8.34)	56.23 (8.96)
Education	Primary or secondary school			
	4 (6.8)	4 (7.1)	31 (52.5)	34 (60.7)
	High school			
28 (39.3)	22 (39.3)	21 (35.6)	20 (35.7)	
University				
30 (50.0)	30 (50.0)	7 (11.9)	2 (3.6)	



**Table 2.** Mean scores of marital commitment questionnaire and the pros and cons of commitment

Measures	No. (%)			
	Older Generation		Younger Generation	
	Men (n=60)	Women (n=60)	Men (n=60)	Women (n=60)
Positive emotions	74.10 (14.95)	71.46 (18.89)	80.68 (14.60)	81.00 (16.78)
Negative emotions	49.98 (18.85)	53.25 (24.40)	47.17 (18.93)	47.62 (20.48)
Constraining emotions	45.88 (18.38)	48.98 (22.95)	44.81 (19.68)	40.16 (20.25)
Personal commitment	61.28 (7.95)	59.29 (7.85)	63.80 (7.12)	63.05 (7.91)
Moral commitment	43.36 (5.56)	44.02 (5.31)	43.85 (4.94)	44.59 (5.07)
Structural commitment	40.16 (5.00)	39.84 (4.59)	40.74 (4.86)	40.98 (4.62)



**Table 3.** The correlation between emotions of commitment and commitment types for both generations

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6
Positive emotions						
Negative emotions	-0.379*					
Constraining emotions	-0.340*	-0.893*				
Personal commitment	-0.464*	-0.87*	-0.331*			
Moral commitment	-0.132**	-0.161**	-0.130**	0.620*		
Structural commitment	-0.317*	-0.256*	-0.212*	0.709*	0.662*	

\*P<0.01, \*\* P<0.05



**Table 4.** Results of MANOVA for intergenerational differences in commitment (n=120)

Measures	Mean±SD		P	Cohen's d
	Older Generation	Younger Generation		
Positive emotions	73.13±17.13	80.63±15.55	0.0001	0.45
Negative emotions	51.54±21.68	47.81±19.68	0.127	0.18
Constraining emotions	47.22±20.75	42.50±20.17	0.072	0.23
Personal commitment	60.35±7.95	63.30±7.57	0.002	0.38
Moral commitment	43.78±5.51	43.96±4.86	0.441	0.03
Structural commitment	40.00±4.84	40.74±4.68	0.175	0.15



significant (P>0.05), which showed covariance matrices are equal. Levene's test was not significant in all variables (P>0.05), which showed that error variances are identical in all variables.

Table 4 presents the results of MANOVA for intergenerational differences, which showed significant differences between both generations in commitment types

and emotions of commitment. The younger generation attained higher scores in positive emotions of commitment (P<0.0001), but no difference was observed in negative and constraining emotions between the groups (P>0.05). Furthermore, the younger generation had higher scores in personal commitment compared to the

**Table 5.** Results of MANOVA for gender differences in commitment (n: 240; men: 120; Women: 120)

Measures	Mean±SD		P	Cohen's d
	Men	Women		
Positive emotions	77.58±15.24	76.19±18.20	0.60	0.08
Negative emotions	48.48±18.77	50.89±22.60	0.49	0.11
Constraining emotions	45.01±18.97	44.68±22.15	0.08	0.01
Personal commitment	62.58±7.66	61.07±80.08	0.18	0.02
Moral commitment	43.52±5.22	44.22±5.13	0.30	0.13
Structural commitment	44.22±5.13	40.37±4.90	0.93	0.76



older generation ( $P < 0.01$ ), but differences were not significant in moral and structural commitment ( $P > 0.05$ ).

Table 5 presents the results of MANOVA for the gender differences in commitment. No gender differences were observed in commitment types and emotions of commitment ( $P > 0.05$ ).

## Discussion

The present study demonstrated intergenerational differences in commitment types and emotions of commitment in Iranian married couples. The older generation experienced lower positive emotions of commitment, but no differences were found in negative and constraining emotions of commitment. The older generation also reported lower scores of personal commitment compared to the younger generation, but no differences were observed in moral commitment and structural commitment. To our knowledge, previous studies did not focus on intergenerational differences of commitment in Iranian married couples. Prior studies found intergenerational differences in different cultures. Our study was consistent with a previous study that found an intergenerational difference in relationship standards among Iranian couples [12]. The finding is also in line with prior studies that found intergenerational differences of commitment in other cultures [10, 11].

One study showed that people compare their standards with their experiences of commitment. Thus, the inconsistency in this comparison results in negative emotions, but consistency leads to positive experiences of emotion [16]. Therefore, intergenerational changes in standards result in changes in emotions of commitment.

These differences in commitment types may also be because of different stages of the lifecycles between the two generations. In other words, the older generation was in the middle age in which physical attractiveness declines. Furthermore, previous studies showed that the duration of the marriage is related to marital satisfaction, and marital satisfaction is higher in the early years of marriage [18]. Therefore, another explanation for the difference in positive emotions of commitment is that the younger generation was in the early years of marriage and had higher amounts of marital satisfaction and reported more positive emotions regarding commitment.

We also observed no gender differences in commitment types and emotions of commitment. These results are inconsistent with previous studies that found gender differences in commitment types [6, 11, 13]. One study showed that men and women are different in experiencing com-

mitment-related emotions [7]. They reported that women experience more positive emotions, but men experience more constraining emotions regarding commitment. Another one found that traditional women tend to be committed morally to their marriage, but the modern women who believe in gender equality are different from traditional women in this aspect [11]. Research also found that men tended more to overcome negative and constraining emotions of commitment than women [13].

One potential explanation for this inconsistency is that previous studies mostly estimated the degree of commitments, but this study assessed gender differences in types and emotions of commitment. Another explanation for this inconsistency is cultural differences. Prior studies have shown cultural differences in commitment and marital relationships. One study found a cultural difference in American subcultures in commitment types [9]. It seems that contrary to western cultures, in Iranian culture, both men and women do not differ in their experiences of commitment types and emotions of commitment.

The findings pointed out that commitment types are associated with emotions of commitment. Our results were in line with the prior study, which found that commitment types are related to emotions of commitment [7]. Positive emotions had a weak correlation with personal commitment and structural commitment, negative emotions had a weak correlation with personal commitment, and constraining emotions had a weak correlation with personal commitment, which highlights the role of emotions in persons who reported having a personal commitment.

One limitation of the present research was the cross-sectional design of the study. Another limitation was a lack of control over other factors related to commitment, such as family life cycle and religiosity. Another limitation was that we just included married couples while ignored different types of relationship, such as cohabiting couples. Another limitation was the exclusion of divorced couples from the research. Despite these limitations, our findings raise the level of understanding the intergenerational differences of commitment and assessed intergenerational differences of commitment in Iranian married couples for the first time. Future studies must use longitudinal designs in the intergenerational studies of commitment in Iranian couples. Using an indicator of marital satisfaction in future research is recommended.

## Conclusion

The results of the study indicated intergenerational differences in commitment types and emotions of com-

mitment in Iranian married couples. The younger generation experienced more positive emotions regarding commitment, but the two groups did not differ in negative and constraining emotions. The younger generation also reported higher scores in personal commitment but no differences in moral and structural commitment. We also found no gender differences in commitment types and emotions of commitment. Furthermore, this paper showed that types of commitment are associated with emotions of commitment.

## Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

The study was Ethically approved (License No./S/850/106) and registered on February, 2020.

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### Authors' contributions

Study design: Bahare Shokrani, Parisa Sadat Seyed Mousavi; Data collection and analysis: Bahare Shokrani; Manuscript preparation: Bahare Shokrani, Parisa Sadat Seyed Mousavi.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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